Author's response to reviews

Title: Formation of medical student professional identity: categorizing lapses of professionalism, and the learning environment.

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Adrian Aldcroft
Executive Editor
BMC Medical Education

Dear Mr. Aldcroft

We are pleased to have had the opportunity to revise our article for consideration to BMC Medical Education: “Formation of medical student professional identity: categorizing lapses of professionalism, and the learning environment”, authored by Dr. W. Hendelman and Dr. A. Byszewski.

Reviewer #1 (Marc Soethout) made several suggestions for improvement of the manuscript:

1. The paper is much too long, especially the Discussion:
   A determined effort was taken to shorten the Discussion by deleting comments and rearranging the topics more compactly. This resulted in a cut of almost 500 words (about 10% from the original manuscript). In addition, 5 references have been deleted.

2. Combine Figures 2 & 3:
   This has been accomplished by showing the results for both pre-clerkship and clerkship for the 6 domains with the highest number of responses, and eliminating the 5 domains that had few responses from the graphs. However, some additional text was needed to report on these domains.

3. The survey was done in 2006 – what has changed and Table 4:
   We have not included Table 4 in the Results section because, in our opinion, it was not part of the study and have therefore left it in the Discussion. This Table indicates the various initiatives that have been taken as a result of the study, as well as measures that are being considered.

   A repeat survey has not yet been done.

4. Comments about the response rate and related matters:
   The questions about the response rate numbers have been clarified. It was unfortunate that there was a low response rate from the upper year students as additional insights could have been provided. We found the clerkship students posed the greatest challenge to survey because either they were too immersed in clinical duties (3rd year) or were dispersed (4th year) while preparing for residency matches.

   Gender differences were not included in the data gathering.
5. **The topic of setting:**
   The only data that was collected on this issue is mentioned in the Results section (at the end) – most of the incidences in the clerkship occurred on the wards in the hospital; the location of the incidences at the pre-clerkship level are not as clearly known.

Reviewer #2 (Fred C.J. Stevens) comments have also been addressed:

1. **Data analysis/relevance:**
   We have tried to ensure that analysis of the data is clarified in the revised discussion section, particularly as it is centered within the current literature review.

   It is important to emphasize that there is limited literature that is just emerging about the specific nature of professionalism lapses in medical schools. We feel that our study adds novel information to this field.

2. **Low response rate:**
   The overall response rate falls just below 50%. Given that medical students are inundated with surveys and evaluations, obtaining a higher response rate is an ongoing struggle for this type of exploration. We found the clerkship students posed the greatest challenge to survey because either they were too immersed in clinical duties (3rd year) or were dispersed (4th year) while preparing for residency matches.

3. **Including other medical schools:**
   In the future we may consider repeating the study and including other medical schools, but this was not feasible at the time of the original curriculum review.

4. **Shortening the article:**
   The overall word count has been decreased in both the introduction and discussion sections, as outlined.

We wish to express our thanks to the reviewers for their comments and suggestions, which have served to improve the article and clarify the relevance to the issue of the formation of medical student professional identity and the learning environment.

Sincerely

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